

November 4, 2016

2015-2017 SECRETARY'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL HEALTH

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Jamie L. Whitten Building, Room 200A
Washington, DC 2025

Re: SACAH Advisory Recommendations Report September 2016 Meeting

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

On behalf of the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Animal Health, I am very pleased to provide you with the recommendations from our September 2016 advisory meeting. These resulted from a 2-day meeting held in Washington, DC. We had all committee members present, representing a balanced cross-section of the greater agricultural community. While there was a broad range of topics considered, I believe the recommendations reflect the breadth of our discussions which included:

1. Emerging Disease Response Plan
2. Comprehensive Integrated Animal Health Surveillance
3. Veterinary Service (VS) Stakeholder Engagement with Traditional and Non-Traditional Stakeholders
4. National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF)
5. Maximizing the value of SACAH to VS

I believe that the Committee's enclosed report captures divergent points of view and I am happy to report that consensus was achieved for each recommendation. I hope you find the recommendations helpful and that you will contact me if have any questions or need any clarification.

It's been an honor to serve as Chair of this Committee and, I'm sure I speak for my SACAH colleagues in saying: ***we are committed to the task of making U.S. agricultural the best the world has to offer.***

We expect that the USDA will take our recommendations under advisement, as appropriate, and as in the best interest of those we serve.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Elizabeth Wagstrom". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth Wagstrom, DVM

Chair

2015 – 2017 SECRETARY'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL HEALTH

Recommendations of the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Animal Health September 2016 Meeting

The Secretary's Advisory Committee on Animal Health (SACAH) met September 7 and 8 in Washington, DC to discuss, deliberate, and develop recommendations to benefit animal health. The Committee produced recommendations on the following topics:

- Emerging Disease Response Plan
- Comprehensive Integrated Animal Health Surveillance
- Veterinary Service (VS) Stakeholder Engagement with Traditional and Non-Traditional Stakeholders
- National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF)
- Maximizing the value of SACAH to VS

Emerging Disease Response Plan Recommendations

The Agency requested that the Committee provide recommendations for changes to the DRAFT Emerging Disease Response Plan. Particularly with respect to:

- *Are there thresholds that should be established before a disease is considered an emerging disease, and if so what are they?*
- *What additional criteria for response should be considered?*
- *What criteria (or combinations of criteria) should VS focus on when determining response activities typically used in control or eradication programs (movement restrictions, vaccination activities, depopulation)*
- *What evidence should VS consider to determine when (or if) an emerging disease is endemic?*

Recommendations:

- The Committee considered the definition of an Emerging Disease provided in 1.5 acceptable as written
- The Committee recommends that a finding of a new/novel agent not associated with a disease should not be actionable.
- The Committee had concerns that the triggers described in Appendix A and Appendix B were not clearly defined, and suggested the following clarification.
 - Triggers for considering an endemic disease as an emerging disease are situation dependent and include:
 - Unexpected increases in mortality/morbidity over a previously defined range for the disease causing agent;
 - Other epidemiological patterns or production impacts which are unexpected
 - Appendix A – under the “significant” category, consider whether this should be two or more commodities and clarify what is meant by commodity in this context (sector versus commodity). Adding an additional column for transmission potential may add further clarity.
- The Committee recommended that active surveillance be implemented when an “impending risk” is identified.

- Page 11 – final sentence paragraph 2, add contagiousness and impact on rare/heritage genetics. These criteria are used in Appendix B, part 2 to evaluate and characterize the emerging disease threat.
- *Tribal* should be included wherever *state* is used in the document.
- USDA should define in advance criteria used to determine when a disease moves from emerging to endemic.
- Roles described on page 9 should be inclusive of states and industry throughout the process from identification of an emerging disease through the development of response options and communication.

Comprehensive Integrated Animal Health Surveillance Recommendations

The Agency asked the Committee to provide recommendations on how best to help all stakeholders understand the importance of robust data collection, integration and reporting to the ultimate realization of comprehensive integrated animal health surveillance. Support for the various data management assessments that are currently ongoing to find both short term and long-term solutions to management of animal health data. The Committee was asked to provide suggestions on the needs of external customers and stakeholders for animal health information including the how best to access the information, the availability frequency, and the reporting format(s).

Recommendations:

- The Committee’s discussion and recommendations focused on how federal agencies, state agencies and licensed laboratories manage their data, communicate with each other, and provide data to the public. The Committee considers improving these internal and interactive aspects a high priority. This can, and should be, accomplished without imposing any new requirements on producers or private (accredited) veterinarians.
- The Agency should establish and continue outgoing partnerships with industry and outreach to non-traditional stakeholders and other industry organizations. The goal of these partnerships is to:
 - determine animal health surveillance goals,
 - determine which data to access,
 - identify gaps to meet animal health surveillance goals,
 - continue to work to identify and prioritize the streams, and
 - establish parameters and protocols for sharing.

When common goals for CIS are agreed upon, the Committee urges USDA, states, tribes, veterinarians and industries to move forward on implementation of data sharing.

- The Committee recommends that USDA access the resources necessary to bring the full network of animal health laboratories the capability to electronically message and share data.
- The Committee recommends that USDA continues to prioritize, leverage and work with industry to identify additional resources to electronically generate and message the full complement of diagnostic test results using standardized Logical Observation Identifier Names and Codes (LOINC®) and an Health Level-7 (HL7) message structure that are consistent with the NAHLN/USDA schema.

- The Committee recommends that USDA take action, when appropriate, on comprehensive integrative surveillance findings based on risk analysis.
- The Committee recommends that the NLRAD serve as a surveillance stream for CIS. Summary reports of CIS should be made publically available as soon as practicable. The reports are key to making the funding available for control, treatment, management and research.

VS Stakeholder Engagement with Traditional and Non-Traditional Stakeholders

What collaboration and communication strategies are VS leveraging that are most effective, and where are the opportunities for improved collaboration and outreach? What communication strategies have been most effective in distributing Veterinary Services' animal health messages?

Recommendations:

- Several Committee members identified NAHMS as an effective tool. The information is simple to get to, easy to use, and has information in multiple formats.
- Several Committee members have also found the USDA website to be a good tool. There is concern about difficulty in locating specific information, as well as the problem of outdated information available on the internet. Conference calls, with the information posted on the website immediately afterward, work well.
- Another identified effective tool is in-person involvement of APHIS staff. When APHIS staff serve on organizational committees such as industry or state veterinary medical associations it allows APHIS to receive input from the other members who will then disseminate information they learn from the APHIS staff. Speaking at events or at committee meetings is also effective. Taking opportunities to meet with producers during non-emergency situations is useful for building relationships. The Committee discussed the need to have consistent messaging at all levels (i.e. having VS staff providing consistent information), but ensuring that the staff are empowered to speak freely with producers and groups.
- The information provided through veterinary accreditation improves preparedness on the part of practicing veterinarians, and should be continued and promoted.

What communication strategies could VS use to improve messaging to stakeholders? Does SACAH have any specific recommendations regarding the education materials available to the public, such as fact sheets, web pages, and producer job aids? What communication strategies could VS use to improve messaging to State Officials, Tribal Nations, local government, industry, producers, and nontraditional communities?

Recommendations:

- Communications are everyone's job
- Communications should be viewed as bidirectional, getting input from stakeholders on an ongoing basis as well as providing information
- The messaging in fact sheets should be simply worded
- Develop communications strategies for diverse producers in addition to communications strategies focused on specific commodity groups
- Create interactive and engaging webinars

- Have multiple mini-topics (10-15 minute), followed by Q&A for each topic
 - Embed quizzes through the webinar and provide immediate statistics on how people answered the question
 - Provide additional resources on the website
- Consider social media beyond APHIS's own Facebook page. Identify Facebook or other social media sites of stakeholders to share approved information (fact sheets, FAQs, etc.) in response to questions
- Provide communications through multiple avenues for producers who do not have computers or access to internet via (provide resources in multiple languages):
 - Written materials
 - Radio
 - Dissemination of handouts or postcards through feed stores
- Locate venues for disseminating information aimed at nontraditional stakeholders include conferences, events, and publications aimed at small farmers, homesteaders, and hobby animal owners
- Identify communication channels for religious communities, such as Amish and Mennonite that are appropriate for those communities.
- Consider the issues specific to different audiences, including past negative experiences with USDA (such as discrimination or mass animal depopulations); recognize that the Agency has to meet stakeholders where they are
- Leverage existing networks, including:
 - Extension services
 - Local leaders and agencies
 - Ag media publications
 - Land grant university publications or media
 - Other branches of USDA; cooperate within the Agency on outreach, including sharing exhibit booths at events
- Develop a staff directory or contact information organized by expertise/ area of work, so that people know who to contact
- Consider creating a basic overview piece (such as a trifold) that explains who VS is and what it can do that can be shared by VMOs in the field as well as through other venues
- Easily accessible, comprehensive "one-stop-reference" for all VS data collected/reported, similar to the National Institute for Food and Agriculture Data Gateway. It would be ideal to click onto a state and be able to see visually and with hard data what APHIS-VS programs are doing in each state.
- Increase transparency of regulatory action
 - Advance notice of rulemaking
 - Other avenues for getting notice out
 - Engaging stakeholders early and often so they are not surprised
- Advertise the availability of email alerts and information updates, in which people can stay informed
- Provide specific alert system for veterinarians, perhaps using the accredited veterinarian lists.
- Including consumers as a target audience, in addition to the groups listed in the question in order to develop trust by consumers in VS.

How can VS improve collaboration with other Agencies?

Recommendations:

- Continue interagency working groups with defined action items for collaboration on key issues
- Increase use of interagency agreements and memorandums of understanding to better utilize related expertise found in other agencies

NBAF Discussion and Recommendation

At the request of the Agency, the Committee suggested ways to leverage the Committee in the NBAF and the communication needs to foster a working relationship with the Committee.

What information about NBAF would the SACAH like to receive as planning and construction continues?

Recommendations:

- Any delays in timelines, progress to milestones
- Information about how continuity of service will be maintained
- Information on safe transport of samples to NBAF

How would the groups you represent like to receive NBAF updates? What are the existing mechanisms we can use?

Recommendations:

- Quarterly emails, opt in list
- Annual webinar or in-person meeting
- Create national ownership for the project, not just KS, through a national stakeholder meeting or webinar in DC
- Liaison to SACAH from NBAF
- Presentations to USAHA, AAAP, other professional and stakeholder meetings including executive leadership and general membership

How would the SACAH and the groups you represent like to provide input into NBAF's priorities as the programs are developed? After NBAF is operational?

Recommendations:

- SACAH NBAF Liaison
- USAHA resolution process
- Communications with the National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials
- Service on, or presentations to, commodity group or state VMA committees
- Review NIFA process to gather input
- Priority areas

- Close FAD clinical knowledge gaps, develop good clinical parameters
- Domestic select agents, fill knowledge gaps (e.g. B. suis in canines)
- Utilize NBAF as a training ground for domestic emergency response activities

Maximizing the value of SACAH to Veterinary Services VS

The Committee shared recommendations for ways the Agency can maximize the value of the Committee for the following term (2016-2018) to include problem solving, effective communications, developing and implementing strategies, and meeting objectives.

How to better leverage SACAH to solve problems and to maximize the effectiveness of the Committee.

Recommendations:

- When VS is working with States, VS needs to give clear signals to the States that all stakeholders need to be at the table.
- Engage and interact with the public/consumer.
- Lay out expectations to SACAH members that they will be involved in a working relationship with VS (e.g. topic specific subcommittees) and appoint the correct mix of people to be able to develop work product and accomplish the goals. Representatives are required to go back to their stakeholders for discussion of recommendations.
- Allow adequate lead-time to allow members to gather input from their stakeholders prior to meetings and follow up time to allow for discussion of recommendations.
- While there is value in making recommendations and providing direction to USDA efforts, further fleshing out of the reports to define the thought process and justification for recommendations may improve understanding.
- Utilize the Committee more immediately upon appointment.

Potential agenda items for the 2016 -2018 Committee term that would meet these objectives.

Recommendations:

- Use SACAH to conduct after action evaluations of responses to high consequence disease events and discuss lessons learned.
- Identifying areas of animal and human interaction in a One Health context to demonstrate the challenges and opportunities for surveillance, cross-agency collaboration and impact on commercial production. One concern is that VS or the industry would not be able to take action to prevent the movement of disease from humans or pets into the food production system because the information on potential risk is not available.
- USDA, State and general veterinary workforce development needed to deliver health care to food animals, and prepare for animal health emergencies. Developing solutions to student debt load will help to fill these needs. What is the appropriate role of this Committee and USDA to solve this problem?
- Indemnification process for program diseases, as well as to consider the potential for emerging disease funds. What can states, industry, USG bring to the table?
- Electronic CVI and records – challenges and opportunities to implementation and how to tie into Comprehensive and Integrated Surveillance.

- Antimicrobial use, resistance surveillance and stewardship.
- NAHLN network capacity and capability improvements.
- Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) vaccine initiative